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“LOYALTY,” “INDEPENDENCE,”
AND
“VEILED TREASON,” DEFINED.

SPEECH DELIVERED BY
J. D. EDGAR,
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ON
CANADA'S RIGHT TO MAKE HER OWN
COMMERCIAL TREATIES.



TORONTO.

1882.

“LOYALTY,” “INDEPENDENCE.”

AND

“VEILED TREASON,” DEFINED.

When I was requested by the Yorkville Reform Association to deliver an address to-night of a political character, I naturally turned to the speech made by Sir John Macdonald at the recent banquet given in his honor, to see if there might be found in it any feature of sufficient interest and freshness to afford me a topic. On that occasion he indulged in the usual threadbare apologies for the excessive and bungling system of taxation which he has imposed upon us ; and he made his defence of the Pacific Syndicate bargain as lively and picturesque as could be done by a clever combination of reckless exaggeration and pungent humour. In the treatment of these subjects he was somewhat hampered, however, by having to deal with facts which are more or less notorious. He is often admired for his dexterity in distorting facts, but his true greatness appears in his brilliant faculty for inventing them. In that speech he gave a signal display of this faculty when he made the audacious attempt to fasten upon the Liberal party and their leader a charge of disloyalty to the Crown, and to accuse us of the mysterious crime of

VEILED TREASON,

whatever that may. No student of Canadian history will feel surprise at the efforts of the Conservative party to drag us along bound to the wheels of their chariot, by the fictions and bug-bears they invent from time to time, to scare the weak-minded with their stale cries of disloyalty. In 1841, the boon of responsible government was conceded to this country, owing to the determined stand taken by the Liberal party in our Parliament. Yet in 1843 the Tories of that day, while in Opposition, combined with the Governor, Sir Charles Metcalfe, to destroy responsible government, and to revert to the Family Compact tyranny ; and what arguments did they use ? Nothing but the old disloyalty howl, and the cry of danger to British connection. Sir Allan Macnab, in a debate in the House in September, 1843, said that “he regretted that responsible government had ever been conceded to them, as he was certain it would hasten the moment of separation from the Mother Country, which he dreaded would occur in a very few years.” It is rather curious that Sir John Macdonald entered Parliament within a year after these words were spoken as a follower of Sir Allan Macnab, whom he succeeded in the leadership of the Conservative party. It is

equally remarkable that the follower had been so well schooled by his leader that, after a lapse of 36 years, he improved upon the teachings he had received, and, as Prime Minister in 1879, yielded up without remonstrance the principles of responsible government, when he referred the decision of the Letellier case to England. No wonder that several of his own followers in the House of Commons, who had not been so well schooled as himself in fossil Tory principles, rose one after another and denounced that abject surrender of our rights. In 1843 the Conservatives were behind the age when they opposed responsible government; in 1879, Sir John Macdonald was still more behind the age when, as Minister, he gave that principle a stab below the belt. There seems to be a haze over the Tory vision, through which they see everything Imperial in a magnified shape, like the phantom forms which meet the traveller's eye in the misty regions of the Alps. With

A TRUE SPIRIT OF JINGOISM

they recognize a divine right in the British administration to our allegiance—not seeming to remember that that august body of men are only the representatives of the constituencies in Great Britain and Ireland, and in no possible way can we Canadians have delegated to them any authority to govern us. It was to this dangerous tendency of Sir John Macdonald's mind that we owed the unconditional surrender of our rights in the Washington treaty, and the more recent and more disgraceful reference of the settlement of the Letellier question to the decision of the English Cabinet. In that matter we witnessed the extraordinary and humiliating spectacle of this powerful Canadian Minister suggesting to the Governor-General that, if he would not accept the advice—the unanimous, the clear and specific advice—of his Canadian advisers, who are called “the Queen's Privy Council of Canada,” he should submit the matter to some other advisers in England, who are in no conceivable way responsible to our people. And worse yet was witnessed when Sir Hector Langevin, the leader of the great Province of Quebec, was packed off to London to take his position, hat in hand, on the door-steps of the Colonial Office, to await the pleasure of the Colonial Secretary, to decide what advice was to be given to the Canadian Governor-General in a matter of purely local Canadian concern. In order to cover up the disgrace of yielding the control of a Canadian question to an English administration—who are neither directly or indirectly responsible to us—Sir John Macdonald invoked

THE NAME OF THE QUEEN.

I would like to know if Victoria is not Queen here as well as in England? She is our constitutional Sovereign as well as theirs; and our commissions, and writs, and subpoenas, are issued daily in the Queen's name, which is the symbol of the supreme executive power in the Dominion. That power exists on this side of the Atlantic, and its foundation is the will of the Canadian people, as expressed at the polls from time to time. It is, therefore, as incorrect as it is humiliating for the Conservatives to so persistently tell us that we must look to England to find the Queen's authority, when we have it in our midst, and to insinuate that we are disloyal subjects if we prefer to recognize the Queen as

speaking through our own Legislatures, and our own executives, and our own courts, which were all created and continue to exist by the will and for the benefit of the Canadian people alone. The Queen, speaking by and with the advice and consent of all the lords spiritual and temporal, and of the Commons of England in Parliament assembled, has not the power to impose a dog tax on the citizens of the village of Yorkville; while we may know to our cost, that the Queen, speaking by the Canadian Parliament at Ottawa, has the right to impose any amount of taxes upon us and all that we possess. His usual shrewdness deserted Sir John Macdonald when, at his banquet speech, he challenged the Canadian patriotic sentiment in favor of fuller freedom and self-control as being "veiled treason." There is an expression used as a term of unequivocal reproach towards Liberals by the good old Tory school—the "jingoism" of Canada—and I will take the liberty of examining this expression, to see if we can arrive at its correct meaning. Whenever they wish to crush us out altogether, they say that we favor

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and they immediately wave the Union Jack frantically over their heads and defy us to "come on." You may depend upon it the Conservatives must feel themselves just now hard pushed for a political platform when they have had to resuscitate that ancient and musty war-cry for use at the next general elections. It is perfectly well known to Sir John that any Canadian who would to-day propose that we should cease to acknowledge Queen Victoria as the constitutional head of our system of Government would be a "crank" as hairbrained and senseless as the wretched Guiteau.

There may be those who, in theory, favor a Canadian Republic, or annexation to the United States; but, when they see us enjoying a large measure of freedom, much prosperity, and great happiness, under our present constitution, they are not idiotic enough to propose a revolution in the absence of a tyranny. I believe that the great majority of Liberals—including among them Radicals and Democrats, if you will—are satisfied that, on the whole, a limited monarchy, united with a progressive system of parliamentary government, affords ample protection to the liberties of the people. If that be so, where could we find a monarch who has so faithfully allowed constitutional parliamentary Government to have full sway as our Sovereign Lady, the Queen? There is, however, another interpretation to be put upon "Canadian independence." From the time when we were a mere Crown colony until to-day, it has been the steady aim and policy of the Liberal party to foster Canadian independence of Downing-street rule. The struggle has not been against the Crown, but in order that we might be allowed to use the name of the Crown to govern ourselves, without the interference of the Colonial Office. That struggle has achieved for us the utmost freedom to use the Queen's name in all legislation affecting the peace, order, and good government of Canada. At every step that was made to gain this sort of independence, by the Liberal party, their opponents accused them of disloyalty and treason. There are those among that party—and I am one of them—who think that there is yet some necessary and substantial progress to be made in the direction of further emancipation from the control of the English Ministry of the day.

COMMERCIAL TREATIES.

Our Parliament is fully competent to make laws, which, by the increase of our customs duties, cut us off from trading with other nations; and it seems to be a strange anomaly that we have no power to enter into commercial treaties with other nations in order to foster our trade with them. England negotiates her own commercial treaties to suit her own commerce, and does not include us in them. It is quite as well, perhaps, that we are not included, because it is out of the question to suppose that English negotiators could possibly understand our requirements. If it be a desirable thing to have more markets for our large and ever-increasing productions, we should have the fullest opportunity to seek out those markets for ourselves, as no one else either proposes to do so, or, indeed, is capable of doing so for us. The position in which we stand to-day is such that, if Sir John Macdonald and all his Cabinet, acting under the direct authority of the Parliament of the Dominion, were to go in state to negotiate a treaty for the exchange of codfish and molasses with the coloured republic of San Domingo, they would be utterly ignored, or else treated as imposters by the President of that interesting island. Sometimes the English Foreign Office has been graciously pleased to appoint a Canadian to represent that office in such negotiations, but everything has to be done subject to the approval and control of the English Minister of the day. We have occasionally succeeded in squeezing some favorable arrangement through the red-tape labyrinths of the Foreign Office, but oftener this ridiculous system has been fatal to our efforts. It does not seem to be either conducive to our interests or consistent with our self-respect that this state of affairs should continue. The question at issue here is no new one. In 1870 the Liberal party in the House of Commons at Ottawa supported the following resolution :—

“That an address be presented to His Excellency the Governor-General, representing that the increasing population and productions of the Dominion demand more extensive markets and a more unrestricted interchange of commodities with other countries; that great advantage would result from placing the Government of the Dominion in direct communication with all British possessions and foreign States which might be willing to negotiate for commercial relations tending to this result; that it is expedient to obtain from the Imperial Government all necessary powers to enable the Government of the Dominion to enter into direct communication for such purpose with such British possessions and foreign States; that in all cases such proposed commercial arrangements should be subject to the approval of Her Majesty.”

The proposition contained in this resolution was too much like “veiled treason,” I suppose, to be acceptable to the Canadian “Jingoes,” and it was voted down by Sir John and his followers in favor of an amendment framed to place us hopelessly and forever under the control of the English Foreign Office. If those independent sentiments constitute treason, then I for one will accept the responsibility of saying that if a popular vote were taken upon to-day, three-fourths of the people of Canada would enthusiastically support them, and, tearing aside the veil, would stand forth each as a “traitor” perhaps in “Jingo” eyes, but as a true patriot in his own heart of hearts.

WHO ARE CANADIANS?

When I speak of the feeling of the people upon this most important question I refer to all who claim to be citizens of this country, and have no spirit with the narrow spirit of nativism that would create a distinction between those who happen to be Canadians by birth—like myself—and the Canadians by adoption, who have, by their own free choice, made this place their home, and the home for their children after them. Because a man chances to be born here I do not claim that he is any the better for it, or, as the song in "Pinafore" says that "it is greatly to his credit." Those who have had the enterprise and pluck to cross the ocean and face the unknown conditions of a distant land, are not the least worthy of Britain's sons and daughters. When they have planted their hearthstones here, they will be the first to insist that, as subjects of the Queen, they should have the same rights as possessed by her subjects who remain behind in the old land. My strong conviction is that, man for man, they are the superiors of those stay-at-home Britons. As it was in the days when the Dane, the Saxon, and the Norman swarmed upon the English shores, so it has always been the bravest and the strongest who leave the cradle of their race and go forth to possess new lands, and to subdue the wilderness and force the rugged forms of nature to do them service. These men may cherish, with tender emotion, the memories of their birthplace, as sons of England, of Ireland, or of Scotland, and be no worse Canadians for doing so. They may vaunt in toast and song of the rival glories of the rose, the shamrock, and the thistle, but it is under the pleasant shade of the maple boughs that their little ones are playing and the maple leaf in a few short years becomes the dearest emblem of them all.

CANADIAN CITIZENSHIP.

Let us, then, take Canadian citizenship in its widest sense, and pass rapidly in review some of our claims to be no longer considered in a condition of inferiority to our fellow-subjects who reside in the United Kingdom, and who acknowledge, like ourselves, the benign constitutional sway of Queen Victoria. At the start there is a certain confusion of ideas whenever we speak of our fatherland or motherland, which tends to leave the impression that we are the children of the present population of the British Isles. There never was a greater mistake, for we at least stand on the free and easy footing of cousins with them. Indeed, if our comparative longevity could be tested by reference to the great number of noble old veterans of 1812 who are still drawing their pensions, I believe we could establish, with moderate accuracy, that we are the uncles and aunts of the present generation of Englishmen. Assuming, however, that they are our cousins, perhaps we must be content to be treated as "poor relations"; and anyone knows that there is room for unqualified contempt in that classification. In concentrated wealth of families and corporations they exceed us immeasurably, just as they exceed the rest of the world, but in the midst of it all they have swarming myriads of poverty-stricken wretches, who constitute a pauper class, which is almost unknown in this favored land. Our wealth, if not vast, is widely diffused, and affords solid comfort and simple luxuries to the masses of our people. As it is with their wealth,

so it is with education among them. If they have renowned seats of learning and specialists of great attainments, they have also masses grovelling in dense ignorance; while our educational system is one of the freest and best in the world, and no Canadian child need be without a solid training in the needful elements of learning. In one admirable quality Canadians excel all others. I allude to their genuine modesty. If it were not for fear of offending my hearers in this respect, I could also convince them, by a multitude of arguments and illustrations, that neither the people of England nor of any other country are our equals in intelligence and general information. The reason for this is obvious. Every other civilized community of the same population as Canada, or of one-quarter of our area, has a nationality of its own, and a large portion of its attention is absorbed in contemplating the splendour of its national attributes. Its interest is largely confined to matters occurring within its borders; anything beyond them is foreign, and of inferior consequence. How different it is with Canadians. Our vanity is not stimulated by any national trappings or dignities. We can take a broad outlook upon the nations without any jealousy of them, and not fearing that we shall excite any similar sentiment among them against ourselves. As we are not called upon to interfere in their disputes—and indeed have not the slightest power to do so—we can criticise their squabbles with an impartial eye. We, therefore, can and do take an unprejudiced view of all external affairs, outside, at least, of our English cousins' concerns, and we are led by our cosmopolitan sympathies to take an intelligent interest in the events that stir humanity in all the regions of the world. In their physical characteristics, Canadians possess the superiority which a bracing climate and manly habits can give. As evidence that they are not degenerating, mark the clean-limbed athletes of the lacrosse field, and the all-conquering swing of Hanlan's arms.

OUR HISTORY.

It has sometimes been said, as a reproach to us, that Canada has no past to look back upon with reverence and pride. On this point there is again a confusion of ideas and a tendency to claim for the British of to-day a past of which they are entitled to no monopoly. The multitudinous glories of their history belong to the deeds and heroism of ancestors who are ours as well as theirs; so let it be clearly understood that we stand on an equal footing as regards the storied past of Britain. The genius of Shakespeare, the intellect of Bacon, the patriotism of Hampden, the heroism of Bruce, and the victories of Marlborough were honored and applauded by their fellow-citizens, whose blood is coursing alike through the veins of Canadians and Englishmen to-day. But there is a past of our own for which we need feel no sense of shame. It is not gilded with the illusions that distance lends, nor glorified with the fables that twine themselves about the origins of nations in the pre-historic times. The full glare of day surrounds our early footsteps, and we can trace them from the landing of the settler in the primeval forests on through his brave but prosaic struggles with the forces of nature, until he has wrested from them, first, the barest necessities of existence, and then, at last, the comforts of a home and

the thousand essentials of civilization. Surely this is a nobler heritage than if it had been won by the swords of our ancestors from some feebler race. It must not be forgotten that we have always paid the red man for every acre of his wilderness that we have occupied, just as in the North-West we are still engaged in extinguishing the Indian title by treaties and the subsidies which we annually pay. And yet, we have had our years of

INVASION, RUIN, AND BLOODSHED

The war which began in 1812 was to England a distant affair, but to the Canadian frontiersman it was a life and death struggle, for three long years, with a foe vastly superior in numbers and resources. In this unequal contest the Canadian farmers stood their ground like veterans, and rolled back the invading hosts on many a hard-fought field. Though the Americans had been victorious in their own struggle for liberty, they found themselves in turn confronted and repulsed by the more hardy Northern race, who did battle in defence of their humble homes. The old heroes of that war, who are yet feebly moving about on the Canadian soil that is so dear to them, must have had sorrow in their hearts when they were told, the other day, that Sir John Macdonald the leader of a great party in the country, had publicly stated that he would prefer annexation to the United States rather than that we should ever try the experiment of self-government of Canada by the Canadians. If England were to propose to us that we should to-morrow try that experiment in friendly and close alliance with her, Sir John would rather see us absorbed by England's greatest rival, with our identity lost, and our national aspirations blotted out for ever. If our country was worth fighting for so bravely seventy years ago, surely it is worth trying to keep together a little while longer now. Half a continent lies at our feet, with its boundless prairies and vast solitudes. "Lone," indeed, is that land to-day, but not doomed to eternal desolation like the waste places of Asia and Africa. It is awakening from a slumber of centuries, and its bountiful expanse of green invites the human race to a new field for energy and ambition. The disposal and control of that stupendous region are additions to the magnitude of the responsibilities that are already resting upon Canadians. The future is opening up before us with a promise of national greatness. Let us trust in it, and in ourselves. Let us be more self-dependent, more independent of Downing-street rule, more determined to achieve complete control of the use of the Queen's name and prerogative, to regulate our own affairs in treaties of commerce as well as in matters of legislation. Let us not be daunted by the hysterical shriek of "veiled treason," that comes so glibly from the prudish loyalty of Canadian "jingoism." Let us be true to ourselves, and none can call us disloyal. To a nation, as to an individual, Shakespeare's noble words may be applied:—

"This above all—to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man."

Upon resuming his seat Mr. Edgar was loudly applauded, and a hearty vote of thanks was tendered him for the address which he had delivered.